



## **Crime Mapping and Data Confidentiality Roundtable July 8-9, 1999**

**Sponsored by: National Institute of Justice,  
Crime Mapping Research Center**

***Should professional standards or guidelines be developed for crime mapping as it pertains to privacy and freedom of information issues? If so, what should these standards look like and who should promote them?***

by

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In the spring of 1998 the City of Sacramento began a web development project to deliver, among other data, geocoded crimes for several crime categories. When we originally conceived of this project we had no idea that the City of Sacramento would become one of the first sites in the nation to publish interactive crime mapping on the web. Early on in the development process we realized the importance of protecting the disclosure of victim information and guarding against the misinterpretation of data by the users. The potential for liability, misuse, and misinterpretation of publishing crime data to the web is of particular concern due to the ease of access and anonymity that the technology affords the users. It was however, difficult setting policy guidelines and protecting the city's liability with so few agencies involved in publishing geocoded crime data to the web and very little discussion of the issues.

Having experienced the uncharted landscape of interactive crime mapping on the web firsthand, I most definitely would have benefit from basic guidelines and facilitated discussion on the subject of privacy and the freedom of information. As a component of the development process, many issues surrounding the release of data in this format were discussed and steps taken to clarify the data for the casual user and reduce any potential liability that the city could have incurred. However, once the site was published, we quickly discovered that there were areas that we had overlooked. We took further steps to shore up any potential liability and further protect victims rights. We feel that we have arrived at a solution that works well for us. However, with guidelines and facilitated discussions led by experts I feel we would have been better prepared. Our decisions may or may not have changed but it would have given us a better context for the decisions that we made.

I think it highly unlikely that mandatory federal standards would have much success in our jurisdiction or many others. However, a resource of basic guidelines and issues to

be considered would be much appreciated. The value of such a resource would be greatly improved if it were supported with live facilitated discussions available in a variety of different formats and to a variety of different groups and organizations. Through the Internet? At conferences? Not only for analysts and geographers but chiefs, council members, and city managers. Some of the topics might be...

Things to consider when publishing geocoded data on the web

Protecting victims rights

Potential impacts to communities, economic and other

Cartographic implications

Case studies

Data accuracy

...to name a few. We need facilitated discussion because so many of the issues are in a state of flux and vary greatly from agency to agency and region to region. Facilitated discussion will raise the level of awareness to issues and give the participants an opportunity to share a wide variety of perspectives.

The CMRC would be an excellent candidate for promoting guidelines, facilitating discussions, and promoting research on the issue of privacy and freedom of information and crime mapping on the web. The CMRC has an excellent reputation and established relationships in the criminal justice community as well as with geographers. They have participated in a wide variety of research in the field of crime mapping and actively participate in many professional organizations.

In this age of community oriented policing, citizen involvement, and growth of easy to use web technologies the demand for easy-to-access crime data will continue to grow, resulting in more and more agencies venturing out to the internet. Without guidelines, research, and discussion many of those agencies could make uninformed decisions that violate the privacy of their citizens and expose them to potential liability. We need with growing urgency a federal level agency to take on a leadership role in this area and raise the level of awareness to the issues and reduce the risk of uninformed agencies publishing data to the web.